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SECTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MOSSI PEOPLE*

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121 The African Sudanic states were the subject of a discussion presented before The New York Academy of Sciences in 1949. At that time Joseph Greenberg discussed the rise of these states and evaluated the theories assigning the predominant part in their formation to Caucasian influences. However, the Negro genesis of the Mossi Sudanic state never has been seriously questioned.[1] In this paper I propose to analyze the political system of the Mossi in the light of such questions as: the power structure of the African state; the conquest theory of state formation; and the presence of feudalism or feudal-type states in the Sudan.

105 The one and one-half million Mossi represent the largest population aggregate in what is now known as French West Africa. They inhabit an arid 125,000 square miles of sub-Saharan area drained by the Black, Red, and White Voltas and their tributaries. The Mossi are described physically as "true" Negroes as distinguished from the other Sudanic types. Their language belongs to the Mossi-Grunshi groups of the Niger-Congo family of African languages. In many respects their culture is similar to those of such Voltaic groups as the Tallensi, Dagomba, and Mamprussi peoples of the Northern Gold Coast (Ghana). The people in this Voltaic region are mainly agriculturalists who grow several varieties of millet and sorghum. They rear some cattle, sheep, and goats, but do little fishing or hunting. Their kinship systems are based on patrilineal segmented lineages. Throughout this entire region we find the institution of earth priests who are ritual owners of the land, but political organization is highly segmented and acephalous, with the exception of the centrally organized systems of the Dagomba, Mossi, and Mamprussi.

175 The *Tarikh es Soudan*, a chronicle written by Es Sadi, who lived in Timbuktu during the early seventeenth century, records that the Mossi first appeared on the historical scene about 1328. Between the years 1328 and 1477 the Mossi of the northern kingdom of Yatenga attacked and conquered Timbuktu, sacked Macina, and raided the towns of Bagana and Walata held by the Songhoi. In turn they were defeated by Sonni-Ali, the famous Songhoi ruler, who even invaded their territory, capturing slaves and booty. Askia El Hadj Mohamed, ruler of the Songhoi, raised a holy war

122 *This paper, illustrated with lantern slides, was presented at a meeting of the Section on May 27, 1957. The field work on which it is based was conducted between November 1955 and January 1957 and was made possible by a fellowship of the Ford Foundation's African Studies Program, New York, N.Y.

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631 642 174 114 these conquerors even adopted the language and culture of the indigenous populations, but introduced an "administrative machinery" that welded scattered local groups into loose confederacies without affecting in any great degree the inner life of these groups.[8] Rattray's hypothesis appears to explain quite adequately the reasons for the cultural homogeneity of the Mossi and the other Voltaic peoples. It also conforms to what we know from recent historical times of the organizing and conquering abilities of such figures as Samory and El Hadj Omar. These men carved out veritable empires in this area in remarkably short periods. However, we need not accept Rattray's hypothesis that foreigners were the ones who instituted "administrative machinery" among the Mossi. It is highly possible that the Mossi state might have been the result of internal Voltaic development when one Dagomba lineage established its hegemony over scattered local people in this area. There is some evidence here that the Mossi state had many of the features of the widespread Negro pattern of political structure so common to the other Sudanic states, and this fits in very well with what Professor Greenberg reports about the basic African nature of these states.[9]

631 642 ● 121 171 It is clear that the Mossi state was a complex entity and many persons cannot describe it without calling it feudal.[10] However, the question of feudalism itself is a vexing one, and many scholars limit the use of this term to describe the political system of medieval France and possibly Japan. In fact, not many people would admit the presence of feudal states in Africa although some, such as S. F. Nadel, who worked among the Nupe, call the Sudanic states feudal and talk about fiefs and vassalage. It is now generally agreed that feudalism, despite its other aspects, is basically a form of government. Stephenson gives the classic features of a feudal state as: (1) fief-holding with vassalage; (2) homage and fealty; (3) mutual obligations between lords and vassals; (4) military service from the vassals; (5) inheritance of fiefs by heirs of vassals, usually by primogeniture; (6) subinfeudation; (7) attendance at court; and (8) wardship and marriage arrangements by which fiefs could be held in trust for minors and, in the case of female heirs, husbands who can render homage for them.[11]

An examination of the Mossi political system in terms of the first six characteristics of feudalism shows that this system conforms very well to the specifications for a feudal system. The Mossi did not have an elaborate court structure on the European model and, since only mature males could inherit fiefs, no arrangements for wardships and marriages were necessary. Furthermore, I do not think that these two traits are necessary for feudalism, and they can be considered as cultural content that need not be present in all social processes with similar functions.

Mossi-like societies present a special problem to political theorists because of the importance of kinship in their political systems. Coulborn[12] strongly insists that "A feudal society... is based on contract. It is not

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based on kinship." He contrasts the Geselschaft feudal system with the tribal Gemeinschaft, and recognizes the possible transition from Gemeinschaft relationships to Geselschaft relationships in the evolution of culture. However, this admission places Coulborn on the horns of a dilemma as he does not accept feudalism as a step in the evolution of the state, but as a form of government that develops after the breakdown of a state and is used for state restoration. He states that "The place of feudalism in the rise of civilized societies is not yet complete, but we must pause to notice the profound importance of the substitution of something different for kinship relations."[13] We see from the Mossi data that they used kin bonds instead of warrior-band bonds as the basis for delimiting the persons chosen for government. The warrior-band members were rewarded with hereditary administrative positions. It must be emphasized, however, that despite kinship bonds, it was the loyalty of a man that determined whether his heirs received his fief.... These new vassals were required to renew pledges of allegiance to a ruler sometimes very remotely related. It must be borne in mind that kinship does play a part in political systems that range from feudalism to twentieth century Western democracy.

We cannot fail to observe that it was in regard to the society of the Chou period in China, one similar to that of the Mossi, that Coulborn was compelled to withhold judgment as to the nature of its political system. Shang society seemed to have had many of the tribal characteristics of the people found in the pre-Mossi Voltaic area. Chou had to face the problems of ancestor veneration associated with the tribal lands, and used some of the same techniques as the Mossi. Coulborn found many of these features "foreign to a tribal society" and finally decided to "leave open the decision as to whether Chou China developed a feudal system or a system of city states as its first enduring polity."[14]

In conclusion I shall say that the political system of the Mossi had definite feudal characteristics. These feudal characteristics did not come as a result of the breakdown of a pre-existing state, but served as techniques for building a state from small scattered groups. I should certainly like to keep open the whole question of feudalism, especially as it applies to the question of the origin of the pristine state, until more comparative data from Africa can shed additional light on this important subject.

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13. *Economic Change and Mossi Acculturation*

121 178 177 166 Some five thousand Mossi from the kingdom of Yatenga in the Upper Volta have been resettled on the newly developed lands of the Niger Irrigation Project in the French Sudan. Removed from a cultural setting which has been relatively undisturbed by the influence of European civilization, they are required to adapt themselves rapidly to an economic situation structured and directed by Europeans. Economic organization being the variable involved, a study of their adjustment provides an opportunity to examine some of the cultural problems and processes related to economic development in underdeveloped areas.

131 101 Yatenga is the northernmost of four Mossi kingdoms located in the Upper Volta. It is a sub-Saharan savanna land of red earth, low rainfall, gently rolling plains, and low hills. Ouahigouya, the capital, gives its name to the French administrative unit, the Cercle de Ouahigouya, which has governed the kingdom from its headquarters in this ancient city since its conquest in 1895.[1]

101 173 To distinguish themselves from the people of the neighboring kingdoms of Ouagadougou, Fada-N'Gourma, and Tenkodogo, the Mossi of the Yatenga sometimes speak of themselves as "Yadise" (those of Yadiga). This name refers to the fact that they regard themselves as being descended, as a nation, from Naba Yadiga, the half-mythical warrior-prince from Oaugadougou who broke away from his father's dynasty to form the separate political entity, Yatenga, which bears his name (*ya* for "Yadiga" and *tenga* for "country"). The Mossi have not always been numerically and culturally dominant in the Yatenga, as they are today. They recognize that their ancestors came from the south, from Mamprusi and Dagomba in the northern territories of Ghana.

171 Highly organized politico-religious states representing the cultural amalgamation of native and foreign populations and institutions are characteristic of the Voltaic region of West Africa. Acknowledging that we "owe to Rattray the discovery that these central Voltaic tribes are

[1] Capitaine Noire, *Monographie du Cercle de Ouahigouya* (Ouahigouya, 1904), p. 15.

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TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PATTERNS OF SUCCESSION TO POLITICAL OFFICE AMONG THE MOSSI OF THE VOLTAIC REPUBLIC*

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643 A characteristic of kingship shared by early European monarchies and many African societies has been the hazardous interregnum. In Europe this period was a time of shifting loyalties, intrigues, and bargained alliances; and the people's cry "the king is dead long live the king" was uttered without pause as if to abolish a hiatus that made them uneasy. The European monarchy later developed a strength and stability which enabled a king to pass on succession quietly to his heir. In African societies where the political power of the court was not strong, and the line of succession was not clearly delineated, the attempt was made to avoid a hazardous interregnum by keeping the people ritually ignorant of the death of a king. Only when the electors were ready to choose his successor were the people told of their monarch's demise. Even then, there was some real or ritual violence as the [662 669] numerous candidates vied for the vacant office.[1] Africans have themselves interpreted these stormy interregnums as being valuable for their societies. According to Oberg, in the Ankole Kingdom of Uganda, "The Bahima demanded that the strongest of the king's sons should be their leader and that the test should be one of war. The brothers must fight among themselves until one of them alone remained alive in Ankole Kingdom of Uganda to claim the drum and the mugabeship."[2] Other African populations believed that violent interregnums served to convince the people that a ruler was necessary. The Mossi of the Western Sudan was one of those societies which had a difficult interregnum. In this paper I shall try to show that this pattern coinciding [121] as it did, with a flexibility of succession to power among the ruling group, enabled this population to elect capable rulers before European conquest, helped them to insure the continuity of the ruling dynasty under European domination, and is now serving them in good stead during a period of transition to effective independence

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Mossi Joking[1]

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Some important aspects of the joking relationship as an adjustive mechanism have not yet been explicitly recognized, although they have been implicit in the literature on joking for nearly half a century—since before Eggan (1937: 75-81) made his valuable formulation and prior to the appearance of the two classic papers by Radcliffe-Brown (1940, 1949) and the important analysis by Murdock (1949: 272-283). In fact, evidence for them is present in the materials used by these three scholars themselves. But certain aspects of its full significance have remained unexplored.

For Africa, evidence of these important but so far neglected aspects of joking is contained in the early descriptive work of Fortes (1949), Griaule (1948), Labouret (1929), and Paulme (1939) on West Africa, and it is abundant in more contemporary accounts from that area, e.g., Goody (1956) and Tait (1961). For Central Africa, from which extensive materials are likewise available for comparison, the early reports of Moreau (1941), Pedler (1940), and Richards (1927) appear to be corroborated by the more recent studies of Colson (1953), Cunnison (1959), Watson (1958), Turner (1957), and Christensen (1963).

Some of the interesting implications of the data contained in these papers have not been developed. There has been a persistent tendency either to limit theoretical considerations of joking to a reaffirmation of the brilliant, but loose, analysis made by Radcliffe-Brown or to ignore the theoretical significance of joking altogether. Where there has been criticism it has been largely negative, or the narrower problem of the role of sex as the precipitating factor in conflict regulated by joking has been offered as an alternative emphasis (Brant 1948; Murdock 1949).

Despite the limitations of Radcliffe-Brown's analysis—the important aspects of joking it ignores—no equally ample or comprehensive alternative has been proposed. This paper is presented, not as a refutation of his position, but as a tentative step toward its amplification and emendation.

Radcliffe-Brown (1940: 195) described joking as a "relationship between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other," who in turn is required not to take offense. He recognized that joking often occurs both within and between kin groups and between tribes, and he identified the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical types of joking. All such joking was explained by him (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 200) as a means of reconciling what he termed the "conjunctive" and "disjunctive" aspects of single relationships. The development of serious hostility was said to be pre-

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vented by the "playful antagonism of teasing," and he argued that the regular repetition of joking serves as a reminder of the social "disjunction" of the relation, while "conjunction" is simultaneously maintained by friendliness.

Such an analysis is insightful but inadequate. The social, structural sources of the need for reliance on joking and the social and psychological processes which joking involves are more complex than Radcliffe-Brown recognized. More occurs in joking than the symbolic reification of "separateness" and the concurrent assertion of intergroup amity.

The Structural Context of Joking

In support of this contention I would like first to consider the characteristics of the structural contexts in which joking tends to be institutionalized. For it is from the nature of certain social structural situations that joking derives its reason for being.

I suggest that wherever joking is institutionalized, the relations between the participants will tend to be characterized by five interrelated factors:

(1) *separation:* either social or spatial or both;
(2) *reciprocity:* a traditionally sanctioned exchange of economic, social, or ceremonial goods and/or services;
(3) *ambivalence:* an equivocal melange of amity and hostility;
(4) *equality:* analogous individual or group status;
(5) *independence:* the absence of relevant allegiance to a single authority.

Obviously the comparative weight of these several factors will vary with the relationships of which they are a part. Where, for example, spatial separation is great, and/or the reciprocal tie is weak, joking is likely to be mild. Where ambivalence is strong, joking may be relied on more frequently and may be more hostile in content. Where the status of the participants is unequal, joking may tend to be asymmetrical. And so on.

I further suggest that as an adjustive mechanism joking derives its significance from the manner in which it provides concurrently for the operation of three interrelated but analytically separable processes: communication, control, and catharsis. These will be considered later.

Joking Among the Mossi

The points in the argument just outlined may be illustrated by a brief discussion of the varieties of joking found among the Mossi living in Yatenga, an indigenous kingdom in the Voltaic Republic of West Africa. Among the Mossi, joking is institutionalized as an adjustive mechanism in the following relationships: (1) between Ego and his mother's agnatic kin, particularly his mother's elder brother; (2) between Ego and his mother's brother's wife; (3) between siblings-in-law; (4) between sibs; (5) between age-sets in the same age-grade; (6) between certain villages; and (7) be-

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tradition of hostility. Such groups obviously have both equal and mutually independent status.

The Processes of Mossi Joking

I have already suggested that the significance of joking as an adjustive mechanism is derived from the manner in which it provides concurrently for the operation of three interrelated but analytically separable processes. These are *communication, control,* and *catharsis.*

As a means of communication, joking provides a permissive and flexible context in which a grievance can be expressed, thus allowing for its rectification and the restoration of amity. As a means of control, the public nature of most joking serves to shame the object of the jocular offensive, to invoke social pressure for his conformity, and to elicit support for the complainant. As a means of catharsis, the joking expression of aggressive feelings reduces frustration and thus serves indirectly to perpetuate the amicable aspect of the relationship in which it occurs.

Joking also gives pleasure. The feeling of triumphant release that follows the successful—and safe—expression of hostile sentiments probably functions to reinforce reliance on joking as an adjustive mechanism. And the intrinsic pleasure of wit may also explain the persistence of joking behavior in the absence of an immediate "structural need" for it.

A more detailed description of one of the relationships already mentioned—sibling-in-law joking—will serve to illustrate these several points. Because of its relation to the pivotal institution of marriage, sibling-in-law joking is perhaps the most frequently used adjustive mechanism in Mossi social structure. The potential for marital conflict is high. This appears to be due to the combined factors of a sexually differentiated enculturative experience that results in marked dissimilarities in adult male and female personality; to an age difference between husbands and wives of at least ten years; to the classic stresses of polygyny; to the subordinate status of Mossi women, particularly of junior wives within their husband's patrician; and to the possible dissatisfaction of a woman's parents, particularly her mother, at the loss of their daughter's services or at the inadequacy of bride-wealth payments.

Whatever its origins in a specific instance, it is important that this potential for conflict be controlled, for each marriage extends the network of affinal and cognatic ties that link the patrilineage to the larger community. Given a persistent potential for strife, the preservation of marital stability requires the provision of a means for minimizing its deleterious effects. When conflict occurs, the resultant frustration must be reduced, and accord must be reestablished in a manner that does no serious damage either to the marriage itself or to the larger context of social relations in which it is embedded. Sibling-in-law joking helps to accomplish this.

If, for example, a Mossi is irritated by his wife's performance of some aspect of her duties in the household or the field, he need not address her directly in order to communicate his dissatisfaction and release the tension he feels. To do so in a culture which places a high value on indirection in emo-

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ship itself and the contract of interlineage co-operation and solidarity which every marriage serves to establish or reinforce.[4]

Although this joking interchange is seen in its full implications when there is an immediate source of dissension between marriage partners, it may also occur in the absence of any specific difficulty. Then it is apparently indulged in simply because it is expected, and for the pleasure which the Mossi, like all people, derive from an occasion to exercise their wit. It is this relatively disinterested joking which has been most frequently described in the literature, and this may account for the failure of many scholars to perceive more fully the important social and psychological functions which joking may fulfill.

Conclusion

This paper has been written as a tentative step toward a reformulation of the various and disparate observations on joking contained in the anthropological literature. I have contended that an analysis of this literature indicates that wherever joking is institutionalized the structural relationship between the participants tends to be characterized by five significantly interrelated structural attributes: separation, reciprocity, ambivalence, equality, and independence. I have also indicated that such joking may serve as an adjustive mechanism by providing for the concurrent maintenance of communication, control, and the culturally harmless catharsis of potentially disruptive emotions.

A variety of forms of institutionalized joking found among the Mossi of Yatenga have been cited to illustrate these points. However, I suggest that the factors which cluster with this reliance on joking as an adjustive mechanism are not unique to the Mossi. Institutionalized joking reported for other parts of Africa appears to be structurally and processually similar.

NOTES

1. A shorter version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in San Francisco in November, 1963. It is based on field research conducted among the Mossi from 1954 to 1956 with the assistance of a Ford Foundation Fellowship.

2. Marriage between the members of descent groups united by a joking alliance is regarded by the Mossi as highly desirable, apparently in recognition of the useful role of joking as an adjustive mechanism. Once such a marriage is contracted, however, Ego and his wife must take care that their joking insults are directed only at the younger kinsmen of the other and that the insulting remarks are personal. It would, for example, be acceptable for Ego to call his wife's younger sister a disreputable shrew but dangerous to call her a slave (a term of disrespect used frequently in joking between sibs). To refer to her as a slave would cast unflattering aspersions on her entire kin group, including her mother and father, with whom, in their new status as parents-in-law, Ego may no longer joke.

3. I believe that joking is also institutionalized between the Mossi and the Yarse, a highly acculturated ethnic minority of Mande origin who live throughout Yatenga. There is also joking between the Mossi and the indigenous blacksmith caste. Unfortunately my data on these two instances of joking are inadequate.

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PREFACE

This book attempts to contribute to our understanding of Mossi society, about which relatively little is known even within the continent of Africa. Many of the data were collected in the Upper Volta Republic between November 1955 and January 1957, a period when the Voltaics were preparing for important political changes. I did most of my field work in the area formerly included within the kingdom of Ouagadougou. I stayed only one week in the Yatenga and paid but brief visits to Tenkodogo and the Boussouma region. Thus, my basic data hold chiefly for Ouagadougou. My methods of research were the conventional anthropological ones: I recorded local oral histories, conducted personal interviews, attended court and important rituals, participated in the life of the people whenever possible, and collected genealogical and biographical data.

In addition, I read all the important documents I could find on the political history of the Mossi people in the files of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, in local administrative offices, and in the Archives of the Governor General of French West Africa in Dakar, Senegal. I also read published works on the Mossi by such scholars as Maurice Delafosse, A. A. Dim Delobson, Georges Cheron, Eugene Mangin, Lucien Marc, and Louis Tauxier. Their works were invaluable to me, and I owe them a debt of gratitude. My hope is that what I have added to the store of knowledge about the Mossi may be of service to Mossi scholars, whose studies will ultimately bring to light aspects of their own culture that we have missed.

The ethnographer working in contemporary Africa is faced with the problem of the time dimension. In reporting his findings, he may use the "ethnographic present" and describe the cultural system he studied as though all elements, even those dredged up from the memories of old men, were still viable in the society. Or he may use the past tense and thus underscore the fact that the society is changing, even though cultural traits from the past may be present and viable. I have elected the latter course primarily

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because, even though many of the aspects of Mossi culture described here are still in existence, Mossi society is changing ever more rapidly. Many old culture traits that I found there as late as 1955 had all but disappeared when I returned in 1960. Not to recognize this fact in preparing this study would have laid the ground for the criticism that anthropologists ignore the changes taking place around them in order to concentrate upon the past.

My own interest in the Mossi grew out of an early curiosity about the cultures and societies of Africa. It was born of my parents' concern over Ethiopia's struggle to remain free and nurtured by the writings of Mr. Marcus A. Garvey, Dr. W. E. B. Dubois, and Professors Melville J. Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier. These factors, together with the help and encouragement of my relatives and friends, ultimately led me to choose a career in anthropology and African studies. I am grateful to Professor John L. Landgraf of New York University, who first taught me the elements of anthropology and thus provided me with the basic tools for understanding human societies. To Dr. Gene Weltfish and Professor Joseph H. Greenberg of Columbia University I owe a further debt of gratitude for having directed my first studies of African cultures. To them, and to Professors Conrad M. Arensberg, Morton H. Fried, and Charles Wagley, also of Columbia University, I owe whatever skill and competence in social-science research I may possess. I am grateful to the Ford Foundation for financing the field work on which this study is based, and to the Arts and Science Research Fund Committee of New York University for help in defraying the cost of preparing the manuscript for publication.

I am deeply indebted to the Mossi people for having permitted me to live among them for fourteen months. M. François Bouda, district chief of Manga, and Naba Boulga, district chief of Nobere, not only welcomed me but kindly consented to answer my innumerable questions about the nature of their political and other institutions. The Djiba Naba, who subsequently became Mogho Naba Kougri, also encouraged me in my task, and so did Dr. Joseph Conombo. Without the help of M. Beta Nyissa, my friend and interpreter, field work would have been difficult. He not only explained many aspects of Mossi culture to me, but put me in touch with persons who could answer my questions, and taught me the rudiments of the Mossi language.

I must also thank my good friend Mme. Ouennam Pousde for helping me to understand the point of view of the Mossi women. This kind lady never ceased to be amused at the attempts of this *yagenga* (brother's son) to participate as fully as possible in Mossi life. M. Frederic Guierma en-

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I

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing interest in Africa over the last decade, scholars still know very little about the medieval societies that once flourished in the western Sudan. With few exceptions, these societies declined or disappeared long before they had been adequately described. Today, historians are poring over Arabic documents and local chronicles dealing with the ancient kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Bornu, Kanem, the Mossi, and the Hausa in an attempt to unravel the origins, evolution, and nature of these societies. Had more archeological investigations been conducted in the area, the task would be easier. Unfortunately, the generalization still holds that for every ton of archeological materials sifted in Egypt and parts of the Middle East, only one teaspoonful has been examined in the western Sudan.

The second source of clues about early Sudanese societies is the work of ethnologists. However, most of the societies mentioned by early chroniclers have changed radically. Of course, many traits still survive, but they often occur within different institutional structures. One of the few societies that appears to have maintained much of its ancient structure is the Mossi. The Mossi were in contact with the now nonexistent Mali and Songhai kingdoms, and they survived the rise and fall of such Sudanese conquerors as El Hadj Omar and Samory Touré. Their remarkable society retained its structure throughout French rule. Only on the eve of independence did the Mossi traditional political organization collapse.

It would be tempting to claim, as many scholars have done, that the governmental system of the Mossi mirrored faithfully that of the early Sudanese kingdoms.[1] As will be noted below, Mossi society, especially in the kingdom of Ouagadougou, did possess in detail many of the political institutions described for ancient Mali. Yet one cannot extrapolate from the contemporary scene to the early Sudan, for Mossi society undoubtedly changed over the centuries. It is my hope, however, that this study of Mossi government will contribute to the understanding of the development, structure, and

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121 [174] functioning of early Sudanese societies. It will also attempt to demonstrate how European conquest affected the political organization of the Mossi and contributed to its ultimate decline.

The kingdom of Ouagadougou was selected as the main object of study, primarily because it emerged as the most important Mossi polity and retained this position through the greater part of Mossi history. Attention will be given to the other Mossi polities and the three other Mossi kingdoms—Yatenga, Tenkodogo, and the more remote Fada-N'Gourma, all of which resemble Ouagadougou—only insofar as they affect the history of Ouagadougou or highlight the basic nature of Mossi government.

101 161 The Mossi are a Sudanese Negroid population in the new Republic of the Upper Volta.[2] They number about 2,200,000, or approximately half of the country's total population. Their ancestral territory, which they call 131 *Mogho* (land of the Mossi), covers some 30,000 square miles in the southern 133 part of the Republic. It is a huge plateau, lying from 1,000 to 1,600 feet above sea level, and broken by three low mountain ranges and numerous small hills. The Kipirsi range in the northeast has an average height of about 2,000 feet and includes the sacred mountain of the Mossi, known as Plimpikou. The Boussouma range to the east reaches a height of some 1,500 feet, and the Naouri range in the southeast is almost as high.

132 The climate of Mossi country is typical of the Sudanic zone. There are two main seasons, one cold and dry, the other hot and wet. The first begins in November with the coming of the harmattan and ends in January, the coolest month, when the average temperature is about 70° F. and the humidity about 12 per cent. The hot season extends from March to October. In July, the warmest month, the temperature reaches a high of 88° F. and the humidity 78 per cent. Violent dust storms herald the rains, which begin late in May and end in September. The rain falls almost entirely in heavy showers and thunderstorms, and the average annual fall is between 30 and 40 inches. In those years when the rainfall is about 40 inches and is regularly spaced, the Mossi can look forward to a good harvest. When the rainfall is below 30 inches and is spaced irregularly during the planting season, the threat of famine is serious. So narrow is the margin of rainfall for agriculture that in 1956 the people of one Mossi district anxiously awaited "two rains" (two showers), without which they feared that in 1957 there would be a difficult "hungry period" (the time between the exhaustion of one year's crops and the maturing of the next).

133 Mossi country is drained by only three rivers: the Black Volta with its two chief tributaries, the Sourou and the Debere, and the Red and White Voltas with their numerous small tributaries. Only the Black Volta flows